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ABSTRACT

The concept of growth contracting in higher education and the applications and limitations of growth plans are examined. In addition, critical steps in the process of developing contracts with faculty are identified. A professional growth plan is a binding agreement, which helps faculty and institutional representatives clarify specific goals. Support for reaching stated professional goals remains in effect until the agreement is mutually terminated. Contracting could be used for curriculum and program development, as well as for the acquisition of new research skills or experience. A faculty development advocate helps the faculty member become aware of all available resources. One limitation is that the plan is restricted to what is written, and midcourse alterations are not made easily. To motivate faculty members to participate, the benefits of the program must be made clear to the faculty. It is imperative that a healthy collegial relationship between faculty member and coordinator be established from the start. A final and important part of growth contracting is monitoring the plan once it has been initiated. A checklist of items to be considered for growth contracts is included, along with a list of strategies for information giving and information gathering during interviews with faculty members. (SW)

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GROWTH CONTRACTING FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

by

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

"Growth Contracting" is a topic which is appearing more frequently in faculty development literature (Gaff, 1975; Bergquist & Phillips, 1981; Centra, 1981; Oggel & Simpson, 1983). The purpose of this paper is to describe the concept of growth contracting in higher education, to examine the applications and limitations associated with the development of growth plans, and to identify critical steps in the process of developing contracts with faculty. A growth plan can be the catalyst for focusing upon the three major concerns in faculty development: personal and professional development, instructional and research skill improvement, and organizational development (Gaff, 1975).

Rationale

Academic conventions have changed as higher education has evolved in the modern era. For example, tenure within an institution no longer guarantees the life-long pursuit of the one specialized field of study for which a faculty member originally trained (Shulman, 1979). Longer career spans and more rapidly changing demands on colleges and universities have dictated that flexibility and adaptation are essential to professional academic life.

Moreover, studies of human development reveal that restructuring takes place in adult life. Levinson (1978) reports three phases in the lives of men he studied, separated by periods of transition during which the individual changes his outlook on life. Gould (1972) reports identifiable restructuring phases of life among both men and women. These phases span the ages 28 to 60, the prime years of an academic career (Weathersby & Tarule, 1980; Brookes & German, 1983).

This restructuring phenomenon is only one of the pressures for change in a faculty member's career. Cyril Houle (1980) emphasizes that, in the new academy (since World War II), people cannot be prepared solely by the four to ten years of formal training that precedes entering a profession. Professionals need to learn continually in order to stay current. Professionals who effect changes in their careers become more potent learners according to Houle. Assistance is important during times of restructuring. The uniqueness of human and professional growth demands an individualized approach to faculty development.

Faculty often raise pertinent questions about growth contracting that signal over-sensitivity to issues surrounding professional development. "Doesn't being a professional include constant growth and renewal?" "Shouldn't it be left in the hands of the individual faculty member?" This sensitivity is likely to result from too limited a view of the contract in the context of growth planning.

Developing the Concept

By definition a contract in the contemporary sense means "an agreement between two or more people to do something." However, the original meaning comes from the Latin root "contractus" which is to "draw together." The spirit of drawing people together is the focus of the concept. A faculty member and the representatives of his/her institution are brought together to provide for the faculty member's professional growth. Often it is growth that otherwise could not be accomplished or accomplished only with excessive expenditure of faculty time, energy, and money. Professional growth contracting is seen as an effective means to reduce faculty frustration when substantial career redirection is desirable. It allows for quick and efficient action which can increase the productivity and satisfaction of the faculty member.

Advantages of Faculty Growth Plans

Growth plans can contribute to faculty development in higher education in several ways not necessarily provided by other forms of development. One advantage of a professional growth plan over more conventional avenues for development such as conferences or workshops, sabbaticals, travel, and research opportunities, is that the plan is a binding agreement among all parties who are affected and who will benefit from the change described in the contract.

Contracting also compels the institution to regard the faculty member as an individual. Often faculty are seen only as elements of a department whose goals and objectives supercede the individual's. Through the process of developing a detailed plan which is reviewed by all institutional officers who will provide support for it, the institution focuses on the needs of an individual within a department. It is attractive to faculty because participation is voluntary, allowing individual faculty to maintain control of their own professional development. By keeping the faculty member in control throughout the negotiations, chances for authentic exploration and ultimate satisfaction are enhanced.

Growth contracts allow another faculty advantage in the form of an advocate, someone who acts in behalf of the individual as a catalyst, cutting through bureaucratic "red tape"

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and providing support throughout the process. The advocate may also help by bringing resources from inside and outside the institution to help the faculty member meet his/her goal. Many faculty are knowledgeable about only the more limited opportunities and support systems available in their areas of the college or university. A faculty development advocate helps the faculty member become aware of all available resources.

The contracting process helps faculty and institutional representatives clarify specific goals. Goal clarification is a contribution both to the faculty member's growth and to the institution's development. Growth plans are long-lasting. The agreement is binding. Support for reaching stated professional goals remains in effect until the agreement is mutually terminated. The plan, therefore, may last even after the agreeing officers leave the institution or take other positions. The faculty member and the institution are assured of continuity and support throughout the development period.

Application of Growth Planning in Higher Education

The process has application in a variety of higher education settings. At some institutions—Gordon College (Wenham, Massachusetts), California State University at Dominguez Hills, Fresno Pacific College, (Fresno, California), Austin College (Austin, Texas) and New College at the University of Alabama—growth planning has been employed to improve teaching. For example, faculty might contract to identify and use effective alternative methods to teach a large group section of psychology. Although contracting could also be for curriculum and program development, this goal would be to allow for resources to help the individual faculty member improve as a teacher.

A relatively new application is assisting in the acquisition of new research skills or experience. Growth contracts may be particularly useful in a graduate research institution if the faculty member wishes to enter a new field of research or to develop more sophisticated research techniques in his/her present field. Without the intense study that a growth contract allows, such change would be virtually unattainable.

An application that causes debate among faculty as well as administrators is contracting for merit. Here the growth contract is used in place of the usual institutional review process. For example in a three-year contract to develop a new academic program, specific goals for each of the three years are stated. The faculty member is awarded a merit rating based upon attainment of yearly goals. During this time the typical standards of contribution to research, teaching and service are suspended.

Limitations of Growth Contracting

Any discussion of the growth contracting process would be incomplete without considering its limitations. One limitation is that the plan is restricted to what is written. Since contract language encourages a formal statement in detail about what is to be done, flexible mid-course alterations are not made easily.

A potential limitation is that the faculty may perceive the contract as weighted in favor of the institution. Institutional officers who evaluate growth plans will do so on the basis of acceptability to the institution. They are not likely to approve the plan unless the institution benefits. As a result, the faculty may regard growth plans as manipulative and more likely to serve the needs of the institution than the individual.

Faculty may also be concerned because growth planning tends to favor the faculty member who is already self-starting and goal-oriented. As a result, some faculty who are disillusioned with their careers and have trouble identifying their goals will not use the program.

TABLE 1

The Dialogical Interview
Information Giving and Information Gathering Strategies

1. Be available and accessible to faculty members for meetings when desired.
2. Let the faculty member tell his/her story and describe professional ambitions and goals.
3. Be open about policies and procedures of the institution. Make the faculty member aware of those things that will affect his/her planning.
4. Explain carefully the type of support your program can offer.
5. Encourage the faculty member to share strengths as well as weaknesses, and suggest that a vita would help in working out a plan.
6. To see how the faculty member's objectives fit the institutional organization and whether they are likely to be approved, one team member plays devil's advocate, asking pertinent questions. (This team-member interaction in front of the faculty member is the heart of the "dialogical" procedure.)
7. Be candid at the outset about the potential success of the plan and the amount of effort required to complete it.
8. Remind faculty of the assistance provided by the coordinators: writing the document, cutting through red-tape, and acting as advocates once the plan is drafted.
9. Make clear to the faculty member the process for approval and the means of communication between the coordinators and the faculty member.

The time consuming and sometimes tedious procedure necessary to develop a plan can limit its use. Encouragement from the coordinators is required to explore options inside and outside of the institution, to interpret and cut through the policies and procedures of the university, and finally to write the development document itself. This effort is necessary, however, to make the process effective and acceptable to the faculty member.

Recognition of these limitations calls attention to the importance of the special advocates who negotiate between the faculty and institution, acting to counter any potential weaknesses. A team of advocates who are also faculty members is more effective than a single advocate. The team should represent the variety of disciplines and attitudes present among the faculty and allow a plan to relate more sensitively to diverse needs.

Negotiation of the Plan: Critical Steps

It is one thing for the university's central administration to recognize a need for faculty renewal and to lay the groundwork for meeting the need; it is quite another for effective strategies to be identified and developed which will bring about renewal.

Motivating the Faculty

There are several factors in motivating the faculty to take advantage of the faculty development program. The faculty must first be alerted to the program and its forms of assistance. Sending fliers to all faculty is one way to do this, but additional efforts must be made to explain the program and lend it credibility and status. If deans and chairpersons have been briefed, they can elaborate upon the program and respond knowledgeably to faculty questions during college and department meetings. A statement describing the program and identifying the coordinator(s) as faculty members is also helpful. Additional benefits result if the program is announced by the chief academic officer.

TABLE 2

Checklist of Items to Be Considered for Growth Contracts

1. Statement in plain language of the long-range objectives of the plan and the names of principal parties.

2. Detailed explanation of the lifespan of the Agreement and of the transition it controls, including:

   A. A clear statement of the program of study, term by term, which will effect the transition;
   B. As detailed as possible a statement of the expected results of the retraining: new courses to be offered; old courses reconstituted; research to conducted, together with likely funding sources.

3. Provisions within the faculty member's department of the annual merit evaluations during the period of transition especially designed to protect the faculty member while moving into a new area.

4. Provisions for the periodic review of the progress of retraining, conducted by the chair of the department and one or two senior faculty members, always in concert with the faculty member, copies to be sent to all principal parties.

5. Specially designed provision to insure the transfer of tenure in those rare cases when a person is moving into an entirely different department.

6. Financial considerations:

   A. Released time for faculty member. How much is to be paid (for a part-time temporary replacement), by whom, to whom, when?
   B. Summer stipend for professional growth in lieu of summer teaching.
   C. Travel support to select off-campus sites (for independent study under a "mentor," conferences and workshops, etc.).

After consulting with many coordinators of faculty development, it seems clear that a program's success is directly related to its location within the institution's hierarchy and to the credentials of the people directing it. The higher and more visible the program is, and the more credentialed its coordinators, representing a broad background in research, teaching and experience with institutional organization, the greater the success of the program.

Yet alerting faculty to the program, appointing respected faculty to coordinate it, locating it high within the hierarchy, and eliciting support from deans and chairs will not be enough to sustain it. The benefits of the program must be made clear to the faculty, and there must be little risk in taking advantage of those benefits. The faculty must see an opportunity to better themselves if they are to use the program: revitalized pedagogical or research interest; opportunity to move to the forefront of a burgeoning area of study; higher peer evaluations (and the resulting higher salaries); raised self-esteem; or special experiences such as tutorials, self-directed intensive study programs, internships/externships, post-doctorates, etc. These motivate scholar-teachers. They offer the opportunity for the faculty member to become distinctive and perhaps even distinguished, a virtual impossibility using only the regular processes of the university.

Advocacy Role of Coordinators

It is imperative that a healthy collegial relationship between faculty member and coordinator be established from the start. The initiative for using the program must come from the faculty member rather than from the coordinator or from an administrator. Otherwise, the program could develop a reputation for coercion or manipulation by the central administration or of "violating academic freedom." Furthermore, having the individual faculty member initiate the process obviates potential criticism from the standpoint of affirmative action or collective bargaining. Special treatment for a few would be permitted when the faculty, not the administration, is responsible for taking the initiative, especially since the program is available to evryone.

Actually, the best reason for adhering to the principle of individual faculty initiative is that it sets a positive tone for further discussions between the faculty member and the coordinators. Everything that occurs during the process of negotiation is within the control of the faculty member, even the halting of negotiations. The right of a faculty member to rethink the matter in its entirety must be maintained.

Once a faculty member begins the process by meeting in confidence with the coordinator, a "dialogical" procedure is begun (Table 1). For this, a team of two or more coordinators, part-time as faculty and part-time as administrators, is recommended. A team brings a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives that allow it to be of greater assistance to faculty than a single coordinator would. To implement the "dialogical" approach, the coordinators meet with the faculty member and engage in an open discussion regarding the pros and cons of the faculty member's objective and how that objective might articulate with the university's (department's) mission. During this first discussion, all views are aired in an atmosphere of openness and honesty. The spirit is one of encouragement though not of naivety. Risks will be willingly accepted if potential benefits merit them; innovative and experimental processes can be employed, limited almost solely by the imagination of the faculty member and the coordinators. The faculty member learns to trust the coordinators and to rely on their judgment and negotiating skill.

Once trust is gained, the coordinators serve as advocates in behalf of the facity member when negotiating with administrators (from chairpersons to the provost) for approval of the faculty member's plan and later to gain the necessary assistance for implementation. (Table 2 lists issues to be considered; not all of these matters will be relevant for every plan, but all of the issues listed should be discussed so that no important element is overlooked.) Some matters are never negotiable: tenure, rank and graduate-faculty status. When salary is negotiated (rarely), it is only upward. The non-negotiable issues are never jeopardized. From the faculty perspective, protection on these accomplishments must be certain.

Negotiation is the heart of the contracting process. Success at negotiation requires that the coordinators have a good deal of personal skill and institutional "savvy." It is important to remember that although the coordinators act as advocates for the faculty member, the administration is not the enemy. On the contrary, the administration is equally interested in seeing a successful plan completed for improvement of curriculum or research. One of the strongest assests of the program is that its very existence bespeaks a refreshing concern for individual faculty growth. That alone increases morale in an era when faculty morale across the country is extremely low. The spirit that should dominate the negotiation, therefore, is one of mutual cooperation and benefit. Everyone stands to gain. Principal parties contribute to the negotiations by agreeing to help fund the project or by permitting special arrangements to be made. After the negotiation is complete and an agreement has been struck, all parties sign a formal, written document which details the agreement. The process typically takes two to four months. The signed agreement marks the beginning of the actual transition period.

Monitoring the Plan

A final and equally important part of growth contracting is monitoring the plan once it has been initiated by the faculty member. Specific procedures for reporting progress, such as who will report and how often, are detailed in the development plan. Institutional representatives who have agreed to assess the faculty member's progress toward stated outcomes are designated in the plan. A person outside the institution may also have agreed to report on the faculty member's progress. Progress reports are initiated by the faculty member, usually at six-month intervals. Results of the reports are shared

with the individual faculty member and other parties to the agreement if the individual consents. Copies are retained by the Faculty Development Coordinators. Monitoring continues throughout the time the plan is in effect. A final report usually culminates the monitoring phase of growth contracting.

Conclusion

Support for use of the growth plan concept comes from several areas of research: human development, faculty development, and professional education, to name a few. It is apparent that higher education has experienced a period of retrenchment since the mid-70's. This may be the pattern for the foreseeable future, at least well into the 1990's. Fewer students and the elimination of programs have led to a less mobile faculty. Current circumstances create fewer opportunities for growth and revitalization, while rapidly changing expectations from society demand such growth. The explosion of knowledge, burgeoning technology, quickly changing cultural norms, and pluralistic demands upon colleges and universities contribute to the problem. Consumers of higher education are now more sophisticated, better educated, and more insistent on institutional responsiveness.

Concurrent with these conditions are pressures from within colleges and universities. Collective bargaining, challenges to maintain and improve the quality of education, and competition with other institutions all contribute to stress on faculty and on their institutions.

These conditions make it all the more important to provide individualized means, such as growth contracting, for developing human resources. It is financially advantageous and academically responsible to facilitate faculty growth, to promote revitalization, and to help faculty continue to be productive as the institution itself grows and changes. Growth contracting can be an effective way to meet the challenges of the "new" academy facing an unpredictable future.

NOTE

A brief word about time and cost ranges might be helpful. On average, the length of the transition is three years: part-time for two years (full-time summers) and full-time for a final year on a post-doctorate or similar practicum experience. A year is the briefest period of a career transition to qualify for assistance from a program such as described here.

The cost range of a typical plan is harder to predict than is the range of time. The cost of a plan is largely determined by salary, and a full professor earns much more than an assistant professor. Plans usually provide a month's salary for one or two summers of the transition period. Release of at least one teaching assignment per academic year (replacement cost is for a part-time instructor) is also common. A normal pattern for personnel expenses in a three-year transition period for a plan costing $13,000 is $3000-$7000-$3000; other forms of financial support are relatively minor. The average costs for a one-year plan is $7000; for a two-year plan, $10,000; for a three-year plan, $13,000.

For 750 eligible faculty, only a small portion of whom will need assistance within the same span of years, a program budget of $50,000 the first year and $78,000 the second year is adequate. This provides for assistance for six to ten faculty per year. Budgets for the third and following years remain steady at second year levels plus whatver percent the university receives as an annual faculty salary increment.

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